# *The Origins and Development of the English Language Chapter 10: Words and Meanings*

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# *Number of Words in English*

- English has a huge vocabulary
  - 1,000,000 words?
  - Half a million in unabridged dictionaries
  - 200,000 words in an English college dictionary
  - 100,000 words in French or Spanish dictionary
- College graduate may be able to use about 60,000 words
- Recognize 75,000

# *Reasons*

- Extensive contacts with other languages
- Large number of language users
- Increasing purposes for which it is used

- Word stock is constantly growing

# *Prominent new words of 2007*

- Astronaut diaper
- Bacn < Spam < Pressed Ham
- Colony collapse disorder
- Exploding ARM
- Global weirding < Global warming
- Maternal profiling
- Mobisode
- Ninja loan

# *Some 2011 buzzwords*

- Occupy
- Hacktivist
- Planking
- Arab Spring
- Carmegeddon

# *What can you do if you need a new word?*

- Adapt a word that they already use by changing the meaning
- Make one up (Chapter 11)
- Borrow one from another language (Ch 12)

# *Change of Meaning: Variable and Vague Meanings*

- Some words vary in meaning with place, time, and situation
  - Place: tonic (medicinal tonic, tonic water)
  - Time: disinterested (before=impartial; now= not interested)
  - Situation: tonic (drink, music, linguistics)

# *Change of Meaning: Variable and Vague Meanings*

- Some words have meanings that are subjective and vague
- Nice
  - She's a nice person.
  - I have had a very nice evening.

# *Change of Meaning: Etymology and Meaning*

- Some people believe that the original meaning of a word or the roots of a word give the “correct meaning” of the word
- Semantic change often alters the etymological sense of a word
- Example: dilapidated
  - Lapis = L. stone
  - Should it only describe stone structures?

# *Change of Meaning: Etymology and Meaning*

- Other Examples
  - Eradicate from L radix = root
  - Calculate from L calx = stone
  - Enthusiastic from G theo = god
  - Virtue from L virtus = manliness
- Words don’t have fixed meanings. Meanings are variable and change from their etymological origins.

# *Change of Meaning: How Meaning Changes*

- Meanings change in fields that are rapidly expanding and developing
  - bookmark, book, floppy, mail, mouse, notebook, save, server, spam, surf, virtual, virus, wallpaper, web, window, zip

# *Change of Meaning: How Meaning Changes*

- Change is not chaotic
  - Sense – denotation, literal sense
  - Associations – connotation
  - Father, dad, the old man, daddy, governor, pa, pappy, pater, pop, pops, sire
- Sense can expand (generalization), contract (specialization), or shift (transfer of meaning)
- Associations can become worse (pejoration), better (amelioration), weaker or stronger

# *Generalization and Specialization*

- The scope of the word changes
- Generalization – extended or widened
  - Reduce the number of features in its definition that restrict it
- Specialization – restricted or narrowed
  - Adding to the features of its meaning to reduce its referential scope

# *Generalization and Specialization*

- Examples of Generalization
- Tail: hairy caudal appendage ➔ caudal appendage ➔ last part of something
- Mill: place to grind grain to make meal
- Barn: Barley House

# *Generalization and Specialization*

- Examples of Specialization
  - Corn: grain – oats, wheat
- How did these words specialize?
  - Deer
  - Hound
  - Liquor
  - Meat
  - Starve

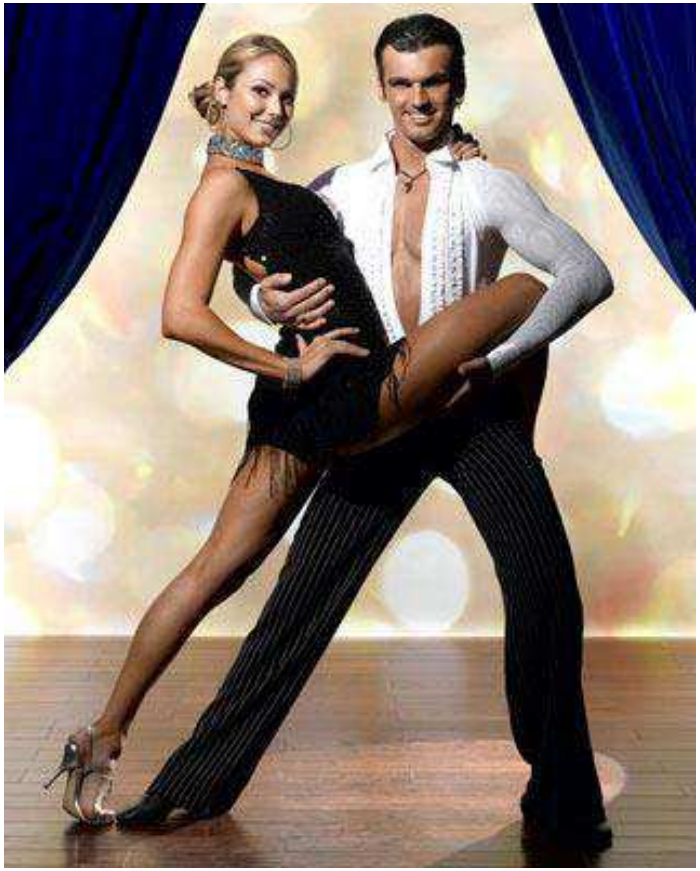
# *Transfer of Meaning: Metaphor*

- Metaphor: Extending the meaning of something to other similar things
- Space ➔ Time
  - Long day, a short while
  - length of a conversation, space of an hour
- Extension
  - Foot of an animal, foot of a mountain, foot as a measure of the length of a typical foot
  - Tail

# *Transfer of Meaning: Metaphor*

- Metonymy: naming something with the name of something associated with it
  - The White House, Langley, Mother Tongue, Broadway, The Crown, the Press
- Synecdoche /sɪˈnɛkdəki/ : a part is used to refer to the whole
  - Cat, earth, wheels, hungry mouths to feed,
  - John Hancock, Coke, Kleenex, Plastic, Pigskin, Iron, Rubber, Thermos, Old Blue Eyes, I need a pair of hands, Legs
- "Fifty keels ploughed the deep."
  - Explain the metaphor, metonymy, and synechdoche

# *Synechdoche*



# *Transfer of Meaning: Metaphor*

- Synesthesia: meaning transferred from one sense to another sense
  - Clear sound, loud color, sweet music, sweet person, sharp cheddar cheese, warm color, warm or cold welcome

# *Transfer of Meaning: Metaphor*

- Abstract meaning from concrete meaning
  - Understand = stand close to
  - Under = among
  - Verstehen ‘to stand before’
  - Comprehendere ‘to take hold of’
  - He has a good grasp of his subject.

# *Transfer of Meaning: Metaphor*

- Subjective to Objective
  - Pitiful: full of pity ➔ deserving of pity
- Objective to Subjective
  - Fear: danger ➔ terror

# *Transfer of Meaning: Association of Ideas*

- Examples:
- Pen, Paper, Pulp
- Mouse, Virus, Crash
- Silver
- Rubber
- China, Turkey

# *Transfer of Meaning: Transfer from Other Languages*

- Other languages can affect the meaning of English words
- Thing
- Old English: assembly, court of law, legal case
- Latin rēs: object, possession, business matter, legal case

# *Transfer of Meaning: Sound Association*

- Similarity of sound can affect meaning
- Fay (from OFrench fae) = fairy
- Fey (from OEng fǣge) = fated, doomed to die
- Fey: www.thefreedictionary.com
  - **a.** Having or displaying an otherworldly, magical, or fairylike aspect or quality: "She's got that fey look as though she's had breakfast with a leprechaun" (Dorothy Burnham).
  - **b.** Having visionary power; clairvoyant.
  - **c.** Appearing touched or crazy, as if under a spell.

# *Transfer of Meaning: Sound Association*

- Clang association
- Meaning changes due to confusion based on sound
- Fulsome praise: excessive or insincere
  - extensive
- Fruition: enjoyment
  - bearing fruit, completion
- Fortuitous: occurring by chance
  - fortunate

# *Pejoration and Amelioration*

- Change in the association of the value of the word
- Pejoration is worsening
- Amelioration is improvement of the value of a word

# *Pejoration*

- Politician vs. Legislator or Senator
- Knave: boy
- Boor: peasant
- Lewd: lay, not clerical
- Vulgar: the common people
- Censure: opinion
- Criticism: analysis, evaluation
- Deserts: what you deserve
- Silly: timely ➔ happy ➔ innocent, simple

# *Amelioration*

- Praise: put a value on something (appraise)
- Nice: ignorant ➔ simple ➔ particular
- Knight: servant
- Earl: man, warrior

# *Taboo and Euphemism*

- Taboo: something you can't talk about
- Euphemism: Greek 'good sounding'
  - The replacement term for a taboo word
  - Politically correct language
- Taboo topics
- Death
- Pregnancy
- Body parts
- Excretion
- Disease
- Social Class

# *Intensifying Words*

- When an intensifying word becomes too common, the force of the word wears down.
- Very used to mean true
  - the very heart of the matter
  - the very thought of you
- OE: swīðe
- ME: full, right (right away, right there)
- Sore (sore afraid)

# *Intensifying Words*

- Substitutes for very: awfully, terribly
  - I had an awfully pleasant evening
  - He’s terribly nice
- Substitutes for too: that, all that
  - I’m not that tired.
  - He’s not all that excited about the trip.

# *Some Circumstances for Semantic Change*

- Words can vary by the groups that use it
  - Smart: intelligent, fashionable
- Words change because the thing it refers to changes
  - Hall, bower
- Meaning changes because of a shift in point of view
  - Crescent, veteran

# *Some Circumstances for Semantic Change*

- Specialized word becomes popular
- Meaning becomes less exact
  - Philosophy: love of wisdom
  - Complex: aberration resulting from suppressed emotion
  - Charisma
  - Interface

# *Riddle*

- A man and his son get in a car accident. The father dies instantly, and the son is rushed to the hospital. A doctor sees the boy and says, "I can't operate on this child; he's my son."

# *Some Circumstances for Semantic Change*

- Language and Semantic Marking
  - Unmarked: sheep
  - Marked: ram, ewe
- Hard to talk about humans without reference to sex
- Bias can result
  - “Men are mortal.”
  - “Men have shorter lives than women.”
  - “Men have achieved great discoveries in science …”

- Chairman ➔ chairperson
- Woman ➔ womyn ☹, woperson ☺
- Foreman ➔ supervisor
- Stewardess ➔ flight attendant
- Housewife ➔housespouse?

# *New Swedish Pronoun*

- Han = he
- Hon = she
- Det = it

- Hen = genderless
- How do you speak in a gender neutral manner in English?